



Suriname

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
February 25, 2004

The Government is still in the process of consolidating democratic, constitutional rule in the country. After generally free and fair elections in May 2000, the 51-member National Assembly elected Ronald Venetiaan of the National Party of Suriname (NPS) as President in August 2000; he replaced Jules Wijdenbosch of the National Democratic Party (NDP). Venetiaan previously served as President in 1991-96. The judiciary, although extremely inefficient, was independent.

The armed forces are responsible for national security and border control, with the Military Police having direct responsibility for immigration control at the country's ports-of-entry. All elements of the military were under the control of the Minister of Defense. Civilian police bore primary responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and reported to the Ministry of Justice and Police. During the year, due to increasing crime, the Government implemented Operation Safe Suriname whereby the military jointly patrolled with police to maintain security in the capital, as well as in remote communities near large commercial enterprises. During its previous term in office, the Venetiaan Government purged several officers and supporters of former dictator Desi Bouterse from the ranks of the military. Bouterse's NDP won 10 seats in the National Assembly in 2000, 1 of which he occupied. Since the 2000 election, the NDP's influence within the military has declined steadily, although Bouterse still retained influence with some military officers. The civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces. Members of the security forces committed some human rights abuses.

A census conducted during the year reported the country's population at approximately 480,000. The economy depended heavily on the export of bauxite derivatives. Government and state-owned companies employed over half the working population. Unregulated gold mining was an increasingly important economic activity that highlighted a lack of land rights for indigenous and tribal people and lack of government control of the interior. It had a serious negative environmental impact and deleterious consequences on the health of the indigenous people. Estimated gross domestic product grew by approximately 1 percent. By year's end, the inflation rate was estimated at 20 percent, compared with 28.3 percent in 2002. Poverty was widespread; it was estimated that 50 to 60 percent of families lived below the poverty line.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Police mistreated detainees, specifically at the time of arrest; guards abused prisoners; and local detention facilities remained overcrowded. The judiciary suffered from ineffectiveness and a huge case backlog due to the shortage of judges, resulting in lengthy pretrial detention. Media self-censorship continued. Societal discrimination against women, minorities, and tribal persons persisted. Violence against women continued, and while the Government took steps to combat trafficking in persons, trafficking in women and girls remained a problem.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

The Government did not address past abuses, which continued to be a focus of concern.

Despite reported interest by the Venetiaan Government, there was no investigation into the 1986 massacre of more than 50 civilians at the village of Moiwana. In 1997, Moiwana '86, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) established as a watchdog on this and other human rights issues, took the case to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), which gave the Government until December 1, 2002, to report on the status of its investigation. The IACHR forwarded the Moiwana case to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights after receiving no response from the Government.

The 3-year investigation ordered by the Court of Justice into the 1982 killings by the Bouterse regime of 15 prominent political, labor, business, and media leaders continued throughout the year. The presiding judge drew up a list of more than 30 suspects, with Bouterse as the prime suspect; local officials stated that the case would likely be tried in 2004.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances; however, the Government had yet to investigate allegations of certain disappearances that occurred under previous regimes.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits inhuman treatment or punishment; however, human rights groups continued to express concern about official mistreatment and documented cases of police mistreatment of detainees, particularly during arrests, and abuse of prisoners by prison officials during the year.

Citizens filed 203 cases with the Police Personnel Investigation Department (OPZ), the majority of which were for physical mistreatment (see Section 1.d.). The authorities arrested 24 officers and disciplined 145 for various offenses. Fourteen officers were charged with brutality and relieved of their duties. Police officers who were not trained in that work served as the jailers at local detention facilities, which human rights groups asserted contributed to the abuses.

Prison conditions were poor, and in many cases they did not meet international standards. There were three prisons and several detention facilities at police stations where detainees were held until appearing before a judge to be charged or to stand trial. Human rights activists were concerned about conditions in the prisons, especially in local detention facilities, which remained overcrowded. At police stations, prison officials allowed detainees no exercise and only rarely permitted them to leave their cells. Detainees and human rights groups also complained about inadequate meals, although families were permitted and encouraged to provide food to incarcerated relatives. There was generally no consideration given for persons requiring a specific diet for religious reasons. Human rights monitors reported that guards mistreated detainees, and that medical care and living conditions were inadequate. Members of the police and prison guards beat prisoners who complained about their lack of access to exercise and fresh air.

Violence among prisoners was common, and the authorities generally did not punish prisoners for violence against other prisoners. Some prison facilities were renovated in recent years, which improved health and safety conditions. However, most facilities, especially older jails, remained unsanitary and seriously overcrowded, with as many as four times the number of detainees for which they were designed. In August, the Government installed a commission, which included representatives from a human rights group, to investigate the prison system.

There was a wing of an adult prison for boys under age 18 who committed serious crimes. Juvenile facilities for boys between the ages of 10 and 18 within the adult prison were considered adequate, and educational and recreational facilities were provided. Conditions in women's jail and prison facilities were generally better than those in the men's facilities. There was no separate facility for girls under the age of 18; girls were held in the women's detention center and in the women's section of one of the prison complexes.

Since 1996, Moiwana '86 has monitored the conditions of prisoners. Representatives of the group reported that in general they had access to prisoners and received cooperation from prison officials on routine matters during the year. The authorities granted the group permission to visit prisons on a regular basis, on the condition that they request permission from the proper authorities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these

prohibitions. However, prisoners who appealed their cases often served their full sentences due to the lengthy appeals process resulting from the lack of judges. The Attorney General's Office reiterated its concern that prisoners who served their entire original sentence were not released on a timely basis. Defense lawyers often utilized an article of the Code of Criminal Proceedings that allows a judge to release a suspect if the case against the accused appears weak.

The police force (Korps Politie Suriname) is comprised of 1,200 police officers and 400 to 500 civilians and is divided into 4 departments: judicial (intelligence, forensics, fraud, narcotics, investigative), general, Paramaribo, and interior (outside of Paramaribo). Police effectiveness was hampered by a lack of equipment and training, low salaries, and poor coordination with other law enforcement agencies. During the year, police conducted limited joint operations with the military in areas of the country that lacked a police presence. Corruption remained a problem, and senior officers met monthly with the Attorney General's Office to review corruption and other cases against the police. The OPZ is responsible for investigating complaints against officers. It recommends whether an officer should be punished internally or if criminal charges should be brought. During the year, six police officers were taken to court for narcotics violations and corruption; of this number, five received jail terms ranging from 2 to 5 months.

The law provides that the police may detain an individual for investigation for up to 14 days if suspected of committing a crime for which the sentence is longer than 4 years. During the 14-day period, the law also permits incommunicado detention, which must be authorized by an assistant district attorney or a police inspector. Within the 14-day period, the police must bring the accused before a prosecutor to be charged formally. If additional time is needed to investigate the charge, a prosecutor may authorize the police to detain the suspect for an additional 30 days. Upon the expiration of the initial 44 days, a judge of instruction may authorize the police to hold the suspect for up to 120 additional days, in 30-day increments (for a total of 164 days), before the case is brought to trial. The average length of pretrial detention was 30 to 45 days for lesser crimes, and the maximum 164 days for more serious crimes. Detainees were often held in overcrowded detention cells at local police stations. A steadily growing number of persons who already have been convicted but not yet placed in prisons, due to a lack of space in prison facilities, continued to be held in police custody or pretrial detention cells. Pretrial detainees, who constitute a large percentage of inmates, routinely were held without being brought before a judge.

The military police continued to observe the legal requirement of handing over civilians arrested for committing a crime in their presence to the civilian police. During the year, the investigation of a weapons theft from a military depot was handed over to the civilian police, because all suspects in the case were civilians.

The Constitution does not address exile; however, it was not used in practice.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however, disputes over the appointment of judges to the bench undermined the independence of the judiciary in recent years. The President had yet to confirm the Acting Attorney General, although he has served in that position since 2000. Appointment as Attorney General is a lifetime position. In addition, the President had yet to appoint a president of the Court of Justice; the acting president has been in his position since 2000. The judiciary was significantly hampered by a lack of judges, which limited the effectiveness of the civilian and military courts. There were seven permanent judges and five deputy judges for the entire country.

The judicial system consisted of three lower courts, two specialized courts, an appeals court, and the Court of Justice or Supreme Court. The Constitution calls for the establishment of an independent constitutional court; however, discussions to enact such legislation continued in the National Assembly due to concerns that the Constitutional Court would have the authority to overturn decisions of the Government. Other problems faced by the judiciary include financial dependency on the Ministry of Justice and Police and hence the executive branch, lack of professional court managers to oversee the courts' administrative functions, and lack of space. These obstacles caused a significant case backlog. The courts required a minimum of 6 months to process criminal cases and at least 1 year to process civil cases. Civil cases were resolved approximately 3 to 4 years after being heard by the courts.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair, public trial in which defendants have the right to counsel. The courts assign private sector lawyers to defend indigent prisoners, paying the costs from public funds. However, court-assigned lawyers, of whom there were 14, generally only appeared at the trial, without prior consultation with defendants. According to Moiwana '86, these lawyers often did not appear at all. In practice, the courts freed detainees who were not tried within the 164-day period, in accordance with the law.

Military personnel generally are not subject to civilian criminal law. A member of the armed forces accused of a crime immediately comes under military jurisdiction, and military police are responsible for all such investigations. Military prosecutions are directed by an officer on the public prosecutor's staff and take place in separate courts before two military judges and one civilian judge. The military courts follow the same rules of procedure as the civil courts. There is no appeal from the military to the civil system.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice. The law requires warrants, which are issued by quasi-judicial officers who supervise criminal investigations, for searches. The police obtained them in the great majority of investigations. There was still a threat of forced resettlement of indigenous populations due to the granting of timber and gold concessions (see Section 5).

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. Some media members, however, continued to practice occasional self-censorship due to a history of intimidation and reprisals by certain elements of the former military leadership, and to pressure by senior government officials and other important community leaders on journalists publishing negative or unflattering stories about the administration.

There were 3 daily newspapers, 11 television stations, and approximately 25 radio stations. Three television stations and two radio stations were publicly owned. Three companies, one owned publicly, provided cable television, which included foreign channels.

In April, the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Tourism threatened to suspend a radio station for 48 hours for broadcasting a report that the President's wife had filed for divorce, alleging that this violated the station's licensing agreement and a government resolution on privacy. Instead of closing the station, the Ministry issued a severe warning.

Journalists and media entities often faced harassing lawsuits by public figures, such as one filed by a former Cabinet member against a journalist who exposed a sexual harassment case lodged against the official. The libel case was postponed, and the Cabinet member received a 1-year suspended sentence.

The Government did not restrict access to the Internet.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. Despite a law from the 1930s requiring a permit to hold a public demonstration or gathering, the authorities allowed public marches to proceed without permits, if they were orderly and guided by police. In March, there were small demonstrations in front of the Vice President's office by nurses and autobus owners. There were also two large demonstrations obstructing the major east-west road by unemployed banana workers.

The Constitution provides for freedom of association, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27920pf.htm).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution and the law provide for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice. Political dissidents who emigrated during the years of military rule were welcome to return, although few chose to do so, generally for economic reasons. Citizenship was not revoked for political reasons.

Although it is possible for persons to be granted refugee status under special circumstances, there are no provisions in the law for granting asylum or refugee status to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement.

The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage; however, in the past the military prevented its effective exercise. Although the military twice in 1987 and 1991 transferred power to elected civilian governments following coups, 2000 marked only the second time since the country's 1975 independence from the Netherlands that one elected government succeeded another in accordance with constitutional provisions; the previous time was in 1996. The Government is still in the process of consolidating democratic, constitutional rule.

The Constitution stipulates that power and authority rest with the citizens and provides for direct election by secret ballot of a National Assembly of 51 members every 5 years. The National Assembly in turn elects the President by a two-thirds majority vote. If the legislature is unable to do so, as was the case both in the 1991 and 1996 national elections, the Constitution provides that a national people's assembly, composed of Members of Parliament and regional and local officials, shall elect the President.

The law allows early elections with the concurrence of both the National Assembly and the President. In May 1999, widespread street demonstrations triggered by the declining economy forced the Government of then-President Wijdenbosch to call early elections, which were held in May 2000. After those elections, which observers considered to be generally free and fair, the National Assembly elected NPS leader Ronald Venetiaan as President in August 2000.

The Constitution provides for the organization and functioning of political parties. Various parties and two political coalitions were represented in the National Assembly. President Venetiaan formed his cabinet from members of the New Front coalition, comprised of the NPS, a predominantly Creole party; the Progressive Reform Party, a predominantly Hindustani party; the Suriname Labor Party, a political wing of the largest labor union; and Pertjaja Luhur, a predominantly Javanese party.

There are historical and cultural impediments to equal participation by women in leadership positions in government and political parties. In the past, most women were expected to fulfill the roles of housewife and mother, thereby limiting opportunities to gain political experience or position. Participation by women in politics (and other fields) generally was considered inappropriate. While women made limited gains in attaining political power in recent years, political circles remained under the influence of traditional male-dominated groups, and women were disadvantaged in seeking high public office. There were 10 women in the 51-seat National Assembly, with a woman serving as the Vice Chairperson of the National Assembly. The Cabinet included women in the positions of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Internal Affairs, and Deputy Minister of Social Affairs. In 2001, the first female member of the Court of Justice was sworn in.

Although the Constitution prohibits racial and religious discrimination, several factors limit the participation of Maroons (descendants of escaped slaves who fled to the interior to avoid recapture) and Amerindians in the political process. The majority of the country's political activity takes place in the capital, Paramaribo, and a narrow belt running east and west of it along the coast. The Maroons and Amerindians are concentrated in remote areas in the interior, and therefore have limited access to, and influence on, the political process. In the 2000 elections, voters elected eight Maroons and one Amerindian to the National Assembly. There were no Maroons or Amerindians in the President's Cabinet.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. However, government officials generally were not cooperative or responsive to their views.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution and laws, with the exception of certain ethnic marriage laws, do not differentiate among citizens on the basis of their ethnic origins, religious affiliations, or other cultural differences. However, in practice several groups within society suffered various forms of discrimination. There continued to be societal discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDs. Hospital workers and other health professionals were reluctant to treat infected persons.

Women

Violence against women was a problem, which the Government had not addressed specifically. The law does not differentiate between domestic violence and other forms of assault. The law prohibits nonspousal rape. According to a national women's group, victims continued to report cases of violence against women and complained of an inadequate response from the Government and society to what appeared to be a trend of increasing family violence. No reliable statistics were available addressing the extent of the problem. In 2002, the NGO, Stop the Violence Against Women Foundation, stated that among those women who reported their abuse to the group, the average abused woman was married, between the ages of 25 and 50, had two to three children, and was employed in a low-paying job. There were approximately 300 abuse cases reported to the foundation during the year. Although the police were reluctant to intervene in instances of domestic violence, a national women's group noted that police attitudes improved significantly as a result of training conducted in 1999. For example, two police stations opened victim's rooms, the first in Nickerie in 2000 and the second in 2002 in Paramaribo, to provide better services to crime victims.

The law prohibits sexual exploitation but not prostitution. Police allowed many brothel-type establishments to operate, and officials asserted that they made random checks on the brothels twice a month to see if women were being abused, held against their will, or having their passports retained by brothel owners to ensure fulfillment of work contract obligations (see Section 6.f.).

There were various laws used to prosecute perpetrators of sexual harassment. During the year, a Cabinet Minister was pressured to resign after receiving a 2-month suspended sentence for violation of decency in a sexual harassment type case lodged against him by a contestant in a beauty contest.

Women have the legal right to equal access to education, employment, and property; nevertheless, social pressures and customs, especially in rural areas, inhibited their full exercise of these rights, particularly in the areas of marriage and inheritance. Women experienced economic discrimination in access to employment and in rates of pay for the same or substantially similar work. A report published in 2002 showed that 89 percent of women were employed in entry-level positions, 9 percent had mid-level jobs, and 3 percent held management positions. More than 60 percent of women worked in traditionally female administrative or secretarial jobs. The Government did not make specific efforts to combat economic discrimination.

The National Gender Bureau in the Ministry of Internal Affairs prepared an Integral Gender Action plan for 2000-2005 and appointed a program manager for gender policy in 2001. However, its effectiveness was limited severely by financial and staffing constraints. The principal concerns of women's groups were political representation, economic vulnerability, violence, and discrimination.

Children

The Government allocated limited resources to ensure safeguards for the human rights and welfare of children. School is compulsory until 12 years of age, although some school-age children did not have access to education due to a lack of transportation, building facilities, or teachers. Although school attendance was free, most public schools were forced to impose a nominal enrollment fee, ranging from \$4 to \$24 (Sf10,000 to Sf60,000) a year to cover costs. Families were required to supply uniforms, books, and miscellaneous supplies. If a family was unable to pay, the Government provided assistance. Approximately 80 percent of children in cities attended school. Children in the interior did not receive the same level of education as those in the city, and as few as 50 percent actually attended school. Children faced increasing economic pressure to discontinue their education to seek employment (see Section 6.d.). There was no legal difference in the treatment of girls and boys in education or health care services, and in practice both were treated equally.

There were continuing reports of malnutrition among poor children, but it was difficult to quantify the extent of the problem. There were several orphanages and one privately funded shelter for sexually abused children in the capital, where 50 percent of the country's population was concentrated. Elsewhere, distressed children usually relied on the resources of their extended families.

There was no societal pattern of abuse directed against children; however, some children were sexually abused. In 2002, the local NGO Bureau for Child Development (BCD) began a campaign against child sexual abuse in a newspaper and on the radio to increase awareness. BCD continued its campaign during the year in cooperation with the Bureau for the Rights of the Child at the Ministry of Social Affairs, which resulted in an increase of cases reported to the Ministry. However, the Police Youth Department reported no increase in the number of sexual abuses it received. In July, one woman received a 2-year sentence for prostituting her 11-year-old daughter.

The legal age of sexual consent is 14; however, it was not enforced strictly. In March, the National Assembly adjusted the Asian Marriage Law to raise the age of consent from 13 to 15 for girls and 15 to 17 for boys. The law also mandated the presence of a Civil Registry official to register the marriage. All individuals must be 30 years old to marry without parental permission.

Persons with Disabilities

There were no laws concerning persons with disabilities, no provisions for making private or public buildings accessible to them, nor any laws mandating that they be given equal consideration when seeking jobs or housing. Some training programs were provided for the blind and others with disabilities. In general, persons with disabilities suffered from discrimination when applying for jobs and services.

Indigenous People

The Constitution affords no special protection for, or recognition of, indigenous people. Most Amerindians suffered a number of disadvantages and had only limited ability to participate in decisions affecting their lands, cultures, traditions, and natural resources. The country's political life, educational opportunities, and jobs were concentrated in the capital and its environs, while the majority of Amerindians (as well as Maroons) lived in the interior. Government services in the interior were largely unavailable, and much of the infrastructure was destroyed during the 1986-91 insurgencies; progress in reestablishing services and rebuilding the infrastructure was very slow. Following demonstrations in 2001 by veterans of the Jungle Commando, who played a large role in the insurgencies, their de facto leader Ronny Brunswijk met with the Minister of Regional Development. This resulted in a promise of quarterly meetings to monitor implementation of the 2001 Lelydorp Accord, which superseded the 1992 peace accords. During the year, the Government integrated 10 former Jungle Commando members into the police but had not implemented the native land rights portion of the agreement.

The Maroon and Amerindian populations continued to face problems with illegal and uncontrolled logging and mining.

Organizations representing Maroon and Amerindian communities complained that small-scale mining operations, mainly by illegal Brazilian gold miners, dug trenches that cut residents off from their agricultural land and threatened to drive them away from their traditional settlements. Mercury runoff from these operations also contaminated and threatened traditional food source areas.

In 2000, the Vereniging van Saramakaanse Gezagdragers, an organization representing 12 Saramaccaner villages, filed a petition with the IACHR claiming that lumber operations, mostly by Chinese-owned concessions, were threatening their way of life. Due to the IACHR's interest in the case, the Chinese ceased their activities and the Government granted permission to a Chinese company to restart a palm-oil factory in the eastern part of the country. The company also received permission for large-scale logging in concessions around the factory. The Maroon communities in the vicinity of the factory protested and threatened to use violence if the Chinese began logging activities. Human rights and environmental groups monitored the joint venture activities of SURALCO and BHP Billiton, which were planning to mine bauxite and generate hydropower in the western part of the country.

Maroon and Amerindian groups continued to cooperate with each other in an effort to exercise their rights more effectively. During an annual meeting in September, the Association of Indigenous Village Chiefs discussed socioeconomic problems, land rights, nature reserves, and biodiversity. The leaders want the Government to honor provisions of the peace accords with the Jungle Commandos in 1991 and with the Tucajana Amazonas in 1992 to establish economic zones around both Maroon and indigenous communities.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution protects the right of workers to associate and to choose their representatives democratically. Nearly 60 percent of the work force was organized into unions, and most unions belonged to one of the country's six major labor federations. Unions were independent of the Government but played an active role in politics. The Suriname Labor Party has historically been a very influential force in government.

The law prohibits anti-union discrimination by employers, and there were effective mechanisms for resolving complaints of such discrimination. Employers must have prior permission from the Ministry of Labor to fire workers, except when discharging an employee for cause, such as theft and frequent absenteeism. The Labor Ministry individually reviews dismissals for cause; if it finds a discharge unjustified, the employee must be reinstated.

There were no restrictions on unions' international activities. Unions were active members of both the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Constitution explicitly recognizes these rights, and the authorities generally respected them in practice. Collective bargaining agreements covered approximately 50 percent of the labor force. Bauxite industry workers were organized, but gold miners were not.

The Constitution provides for the right to strike. Civil servants have the right to strike, and strikes in both the public and private sectors occurred often as workers attempted to regain wages lost to inflation and arrears in payments.

There were several strikes during the year. Teachers conducted a 1-day strike to protest the increase of prices of primary goods. Nurses began a strike but returned to work after 1 day when the Government threatened to adhere to a previously established "no work, no pay" principle and to take the union to court. Other strikes involved private companies where the unions negotiated labor conditions.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The Constitution prohibits forced or bonded labor, including labor by children; however, a local NGO reported that child prostitution existed.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law sets the minimum age for employment at 14 years; however, the Ministry of Labor and the police enforced this law only sporadically. Children under 14 worked as street vendors, newspaper sellers, or shop assistants. Working hours for youths were not limited in comparison with the regular work force. Although government figures reported that only 2 percent of children were economically active, a 2002 survey conducted by the Institute for Training and Research found that 50 percent of children between the ages of 4 and 14 were economically active, working mainly in the informal sector. The Government has not ratified the ILO's Convention 182 on elimination of the worst forms of child labor.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There was no minimum wage legislation. Including a cost of living allowance, the lowest wage for civil servants was approximately \$138 (Sf386,000) per month. This salary level did not provide a decent standard of living for a worker and family. Government employees, who constituted approximately 50 percent of the work force of 100,000 persons, frequently supplemented their salaries with second or third jobs, often in the informal sector. The President and Council of Ministers set and approve civil service wage increases.

Work in excess of 9 hours per day or 45 hours per week on a regular basis required special government permission, which was granted routinely. Such overtime work earned premium pay. The law requires one 24-hour rest period per week.

A 10- to 12-member inspectorate in the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Ministry of Labor was responsible for enforcing legislated occupational safety and health regulations. Resource constraints and lack of trained personnel precluded the division from making regular inspections. There was no law authorizing workers to refuse to work in circumstances they deem unsafe; they must appeal to the inspectorate to declare the workplace situation unsafe.

f. Trafficking in Persons

Dated "white slavery" laws prohibit trafficking in persons; however, the laws rarely were enforced and applied only to women and children, and trafficking in persons was a problem. The 1914 Police Criminal Law prohibits solicitation, but the law is not enforced. Existing laws prohibit sexual exploitation but not prostitution.

There were reports of trafficking in women and girls to and through the country for prostitution. Several night clubs in the capital reportedly recruited women from Brazil, Colombia, Guyana, and the Dominican Republic.

The police had informal agreements with many "hotel" or brothel owners allowing them to proceed with their business. However, police conducted random checks to ensure that women were not mistreated, that no minors were present, and that owners did not keep the women's airline tickets and passports. During the year, there were fewer than 10 reports of brothel owners retaining passports and airline tickets to uphold contract obligations. In such cases, the police assisted these women to return to their country of origin at their own expense. In 2001, one club owner in Paramaribo was convicted in Brazil for trafficking in women.

The Public Prosecutor's Office and the police established a registry of all brothels and their employees by nationality. The Public Prosecutor's Office, in cooperation with police officials, extended services provided to victims of domestic violence to possible trafficked victims and in May established a "special victims' unit" and a telephone hot line to handle all cases from the commercial sex industry. The Government established an anti-trafficking commission, comprised of various ministries and a local NGO and headed by the Ministry of Justice and Police, to study trafficking.